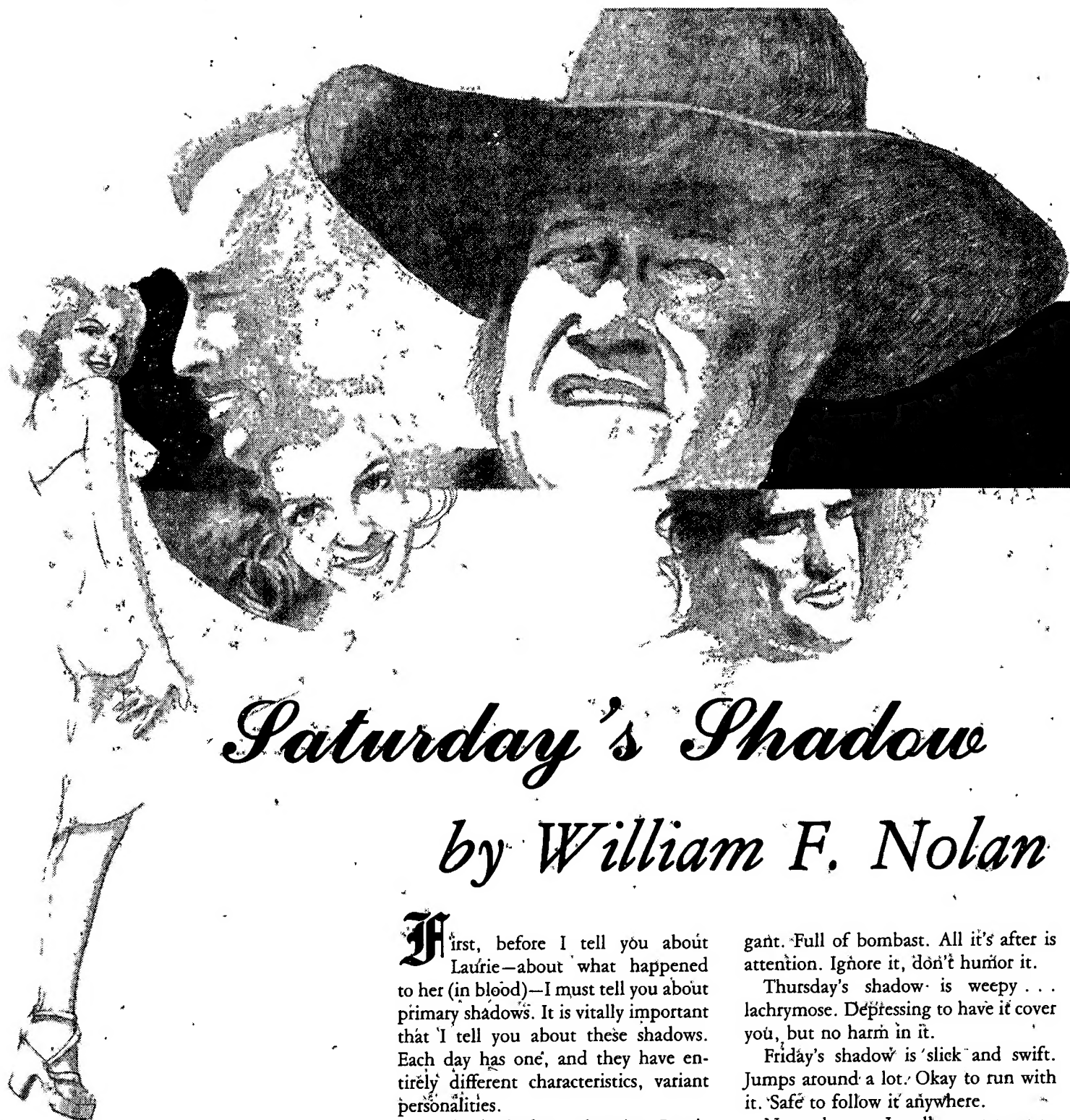




Saturday's Shadow

by William F. Nolan

First, before I tell you about Laurie—about what happened to her (in blood)—I must tell you about primary shadows. It is vitally important that I tell you about these shadows. Each day has one, and they have entirely different characteristics, variant personalities.

Sunday's shadow (the one Laurie liked; her friend) is fat and sleepy. Snoozes all day.

Monday's shadow is thin and pale at the edges. The sun eats it fast.

Tuesday's shadow is silly and random-headed. Lumpy in the middle. Never knows where it's been or where it's going. No sense of purpose to it.

Wednesday's shadow is pushy. Arro-

gant. Full of bombast. All it's after is attention. Ignore it, don't humor it.

Thursday's shadow is weepy . . . lachrymose. Depressing to have it cover you, but no harm in it.

Friday's shadow is slick and swift. Jumps around a lot. Okay to run with it. Safe to follow it anywhere.

Now, the one I really want to warn you about is the last one.

Saturday's shadow.

It's deadly. Very, very dangerous. The thing to do is keep it at a distance. The edges are sharp and serrated, like teeth in a shark's jaw. And it's damned quiet. Comes sliding and slipping toward you along the ground—widening out to form its full deathshape.

"Saturday's Shadow"

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Killshape.

I really *hate* that filthy thing! If I could—

Wait. No good. I'm getting all emotional again about it, and I must not *do* this. I must be cool and logical and precise—to render my full account of what happened to Laurie. I just *know* you'll be interested in what happened to her.

“Okay?”

I'll give it to you logically. I can be

very logical because I work with figures and statistics at a bank here on Coronado Island.

No, that's not right. *She* works there, worked there, at a bank. And *I'm* not Laurie, am I? . . . I really honest-to-god don't think I'm Laurie, Me. She. Separate. She. Me.

Sheme.

Meshe.

Identity is a tricky business. We spend most of our lives trying to find out who we are. Who we *really* are: An endless pursuit.

I'm not going to be Laurie (in blood) when I tell you about all this. If I *am*, then it ruins everything—so I ask you to believe that I was never Laurie.

Am never.

Am not.

Was not.

Can't be.

If I'm not Laurie, I can be very objective about her. No emotional ties. Separate and cool. That's how I'll tell it. (I could be Vivien. Vivien Leigh. She died, too. Ha! Call me Vivien.)

No use your worrying and fretting about who I am. Worry about who *you* are. That's the key to life, isn't it? Knowing your own identity.

Coronado is an island facing San Diego across an expanse of blue water with a long blue bridge over the water. That's all you *need* to know about it, but maybe you'll learn more as I tell you about Laurie. (Look it up in a California travel guide if you want square miles and length and history and all that boring kind of crap that does no good for anybody.)

It's a *place*. And Laurie lived at one end of it and worked at the other. Lived at the Sea Vista Arms. \$340 a month.

Studio apartment. No pets. No children. (Forbidden: the manager destroys them if he finds you with any.) Small bathroom. Off-white plaster-board walls. Sofa bed. Sliding closet door. Green leather reclining chair. Adjustable bookshelves. (Laurie liked black-slave novels.) Two lamps, one standing. Green rug. Dun-colored pull drapes. You could see the bridge from her window. View of water and boats. Cramped little kitchen. With a chipped fridge.

She walked every day to work—to the business end of the island. Two- or three-mile walk every morning to the First National Bank of Coronado. Two- or three-mile walk home every afternoon. Late afternoon. (With the shadows very much alive.)

Ate her lunch in town, usually alone, sometimes with her brother, Ernest, who worked as a cop across the bay in San Diego. (Doesn't anymore, though. Ha!) He'd drive his patrol car across the long high blue bridge and meet her at the bank. For lunch down the street.

Laurie fixed her own dinner, alone, at her apartment. Worked all week. Stayed home nights and Saturdays. Never left her apartment on Saturdays. (Wise girl. She *knew*!) On Sundays she'd walk to the park sometimes and tease Sunday's shadow. You know, joke with it, hassle it about being so fat and snoozing so much. It didn't mind. They were friends.

Laurie had no other friends. Just Sunday's shadow and her brother, Ernest. Parents both dead. No sisters. Nobody close to her at the bank or at the apartments. No boyfriends. Kept to herself mostly. Didn't say more than she had to. (Somebody once told her she talked like a Scotch telegram!) Mouséy, I guess. That's what you'd call her. A quiet, small, logical mousey gray person living on this island in California.

One thing she was passionate about (strange word for Laurie—passion—but I'm trying to be precise about all this): Movies.

Any kind of movies. On TV or in theaters. The first week she was able to toddle (as a kid in Los Angeles, where

her parents raised her), she skittered away from Daddy and wobbled down the aisle of a movie palace. It was Grauman's Chinese, in Hollywood, and nobody saw her go in. She was just too-damned tiny to notice. The picture was *Gone with the Wind* (this in 1939), and there was Gable on that huge screen (*really* huge to Laurie) kissing Vivien Leigh and telling her he didn't give a damn.

She never forgot it. Instant addiction. Sprocket-hole freak! Movies were all she lived for. Spent her weekly allowance on them . . . staying for hours and hours in those big churchlike theaters. Palaces with gilt-gold dreams inside.

Saturday's shadow had no strength in those days. It hadn't grown . . . amassed its killpower. Laurie would go to Saturday kiddie matinees and it wouldn't do a thing to her.

But it was growing. As she did. Getting bigger and stronger and gathering power each year. (It got a lot bigger than Laurie ever got.)

Ernest liked movies, too. When she didn't go alone, he took her. It would have been more often, but Ernest wasn't always such a good boy and sometimes, on Saturdays, when he'd been bad that week (Ernest did things to birds), his parents made him stay home from the matinee and wash the dishes. (Got so he hated the sight of a dish.) But when they *did* go to the movies together, Laurie and Ernest, they'd sit there, side by side in the flickered dark, not speaking or touching. Hardly breathing, even. Eyes tight on the screen. On Tracy and Gable and Bogart and Cagney and Cooper and Flynn and Fonda and Hepburn and Ladd and Garland and Brando and Wayne and Crawford and all the others. Thousands. A whole army of shadow giants up there on that big moving screen, all the people you'd ever need to know or love or fear.

Laurie had no reason to love or fear *real* people—because she had *them*. The shadow people.

Maybe you think that I'm rambling, avoiding the thing that happened to her. On the contrary. All this early

material on Laurie is necessary if you're to appreciate fully what I'll be telling you. (Can't savor without knowing the flavor!)

So—she grew up, into the person she was destined to become. Her father divorced her mother and went away, and Laurie never saw him again after her eighteenth birthday. But that was all right with her, since she never understood him anyway.

Her mother she didn't give a damn about.

No playgirl she. Steady. Straight. A in high school accounting. Sharp with statistics. Reliable. Orderly. Hard-working. A natural for banks.

Some years went by. Not sure how many. Laurie and Ernest went to college, I know. I'm sure of that. But their mother died before they got their degrees. (Did Laurie *kill* her? I doubt it. Really doubt anything like that. Ha!) Maybe Ernest killed her. (Secret!)

Afterward, Laurie moved from LA to Coronado because she'd seen an ad in the paper saying they needed bank accountants on the island. (By then, she'd earned her degree by mail.)

Ernest moved down a year later. Drifted into aircraft work for a while, then got in with a police training program. Ernest is big and tough-fingered and square-backed. You don't mess around with Ernest. He'll break your frigging neck for you. How's *them* apples?

Shortly after that they heard their good Daddy had suffered an attack (stroke, most likely) in Chicago in the middle of winter and froze out on some kind of iron bridge over Lake Michigan. A mean way to die—but it didn't bother Laurie. Or Ernest. They were both glad it never froze in San Diego. Weather is usually mild and pleasant there. Very pleasant. They really liked the weather.

Well, now you've got all the background, starting with Saturday's shadow—so we can get into, *precisely* what happened to Laurie.

And how Ernest figures into it. With his big arms and shoulders and his big .38 Police Special. If he stops you for speeding, man, you *sign* that book!

fantasy book

You don't smart-mouth that cop or he puts one-two-three into you so fast you're spitting teeth before you can say Jack Robinson. (Old saying! Things stay with us, don't they? Memories.)

Laurie gets out of bed, eats her breakfast in the kitchen, gets dressed, and walks to work. (She'd never owned a car.)

It is Tuesday, this day, and Tuesday's shadow is silly and harmless. (No reason even to discuss it.) Laurie is "up." She saw a dandy movie on the tube last night—*The Grapes of Wrath*—so she feels pretty chipper today, all things considered. She's seen *The Grapes of Wrath* (good title!) about six times. (The really solid ones never wear thin.)

But her mind was going. It's as simple as that, and I don't know how else to put it.

Who the hell knows why a person's mind goes? Drugs. Booze. Sadness.

Pressures. Problems. A million reasons. Laurie wasn't a head; she didn't shoot up or even use grass. And I don't think she had five drinks in her life.

Let me emphasize; she was *not* depressed on this particular Tuesday. So I'm not prepared to say what caused her to lose that rational precise cool logical mind.

She just didn't have it anymore. And reality was no longer entirely there for her. Some things were real and some things were not real. And she didn't know which was which.

Do you, for that matter, know what's real and what isn't?

(Digression: woke up from sleep once in middle of day. Window open. Everything bright and clear. And normal. Except that, a few inches away from me, resting half on my pillow and half off, was this young girl's severed head: I could see the ragged edges of skin where her neck ended. She was a

blonde, hair in ringlets. Very fair skin. Fine-boned. Eyes closed. No blood. I couldn't swallow. I was blinking wildly. Told myself: Head's not *real*. It'll go away soon. And I was right. Finally, I began to see through it. Could see the wall through the girl's cheeks. Thing faded out as I watched. Then I went back to sleep.)

So what's real and what isn't? Dammit, baby, I don't even know what's real in this *story*, let alone in the life outside. Your life and my life and what used to be Laurie's life. Is a shadow real? You better believe it.

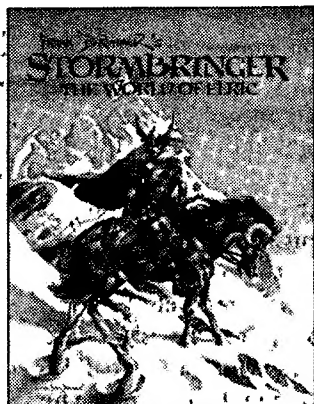
As Captain Queeg said, I kid you not. (Ha!)

So Laurie walks to work on Tuesday. Stepping on morning shadows, which are the same as afternoon shadows, except not as skinny, but all part of the same central day's primary shadow-body.

She gets to the bank and goes in and

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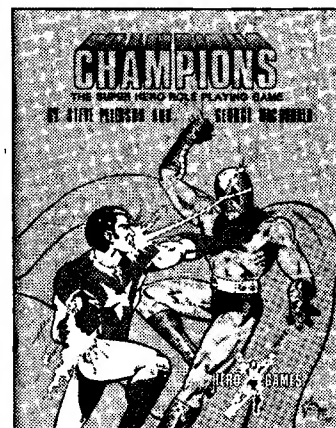


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says a mousey good morning and hangs up her skinny sweater (like an afternoon shadow) and sits down at her always neat desk and picks up her account book and begins to do her day's work with figures. Cool. Logical. Precise. (But she's losing her senses!)

At lunchtime she goes out alone across the street to a small coffee shop (Andy's) and orders an egg salad sandwich on wheat and hot tea to drink (no sugar)..

After lunch she goes back across the street to the bank and works until it closes, then puts on her sweater and walks home to her small apartment.

Once inside, she goes to the fridge for an apple and some milk.

Which is when Alan comes in. Bleeding. In white buckskins, with blood staining the shoulder area on the right side.

"He was fast," says Alan quietly. "Fast with a gun."

"But you *killed* him?" asks Laurie.

"Yes, I killed him," says Alan. And he gives her a tight, humorless smile.

"That shoulder will need tending," she said. (I'm changing this to past tense; says to said, does to did.) "It's beyond my capability. You need a doctor."

"A doc won't help," he said. "I'll just ride on through. I can make it."

"If you say so." No argument. Laurie never argued with anybody. Never in her life.

Alan staggered, fell to his knees in the middle of Laurie's small living room.

"Can I help . . . in any way at all?"

He shook his head. (The pain had him and he could no longer talk.)

"I'm going to the store for milk," she said. "I have apples here, but no milk."

He nodded at this. Blood was flecking his lower lip and he looked gray and gaunt. But he was still very handsome—and, for all Laurie knew, the whole thing could be an act.

She left him in the apartment and went out, taking the hall elevator down. (Laurie lived on floor three, or did I tell you that already? If I didn't, now you know.)

At the bottom Ole Humphrey was there. Needed a shave. Wary of eye. Coat tight-buttoned, collar up. Cigarette burning in one corner of his mouth. (Probably a Chesterfield.) Ole Humph.

"What are you doing here?" Laurie asked.

"He's somewhere in this building," Humph told her. "I *know* he's in this building."

"You mean the Fat Man?"

"Yeah," he said around the cigarette. "He's on the island. I got the word. I'll find him."

"I'm not involved," Laurie said.

"No," Humph said, smoke curling past his glittery, intense eyes. "You're not involved."

"I'm going after milk," she said.

"Nobody's stopping you."

She walked out to the street and headed for the nearest grocer. Block and a half away. Convenient when you needed milk.

Fay was waiting near the grocer's in a taxi with the engine running. Coronado Cab Company. (I don't know what their rates are. You can find that out.)

"I'm just godawful scared!" Fay said,

tears in her eyes. "I have to get across the bridge, but I can't do it alone."

"What do you mean?" Laurie was confused.

"He'll drive us," Fay said, nodding toward the cabbie, who was reading a racing form. (Bored.) "But I need someone *with* me. Another woman. To keep me from screaming."

"That's an odd thing to be concerned about," said Laurie. "I never scream in taxis."

"I didn't either, until this whole nightmare happened to me. But now . . ." Fay's eyes were wild, desperate-looking. "Will you ride across the bridge with me? I'm sure I'll be able to make it alone once we're across the bridge."

Fay looked beautiful, but her blonde hair was badly mussed and one shoulder strap of her lacy slip (all she wore!) was missing, revealing the lovely creamed upper slope of her breasts. (And they *were* lovely.)

"He'll be on the island soon," Fay told Laurie. "He's about halfway across. I need to double back to lose him." She smiled. Brave smile. "Believe me, I wouldn't ask you to be with me if I didn't *need* you."

"If I go, will you pay my fare back across, including the bridge toll?"

"I'll give you this ten-carat diamond I found in the jungle," said the distraught blonde, dropping the perfect stone into the palm of Laurie's right hand. "It's worth ten times the price of this cab!"

"How do I know it's real?"

"You'll just have to trust me."

Laurie held up the stone. It rayed light on her serious face. She nodded.

"All right, I'll go."

And she climbed into the cab.

"Holiday Inn, San Diego," Fay said to the bored driver. "Quickly. Every second counts."

"They got speed limits, lady," the cabbie told her in a scratchy voice. "And I don't break speed limits."

Fay said nothing more to him. He grunted sourly and put the car in gear.

They'd reached the exact middle of the long blue bridge when they saw him. Even the driver saw him. He stopped the cab.

"Holy Shit!" he said quietly. "Will you look at *that*?"

Laurie gasped. She knew he'd be big, but the actual sight of him shocked and amazed her.

Fay ducked down, pressing close to the floor between seats. "Has he seen me?"

"I don't think so," said Laurie. "He's still heading toward the island."

"Then go *on*!" Fay agonized to the cabbie. "Keep driving!"

"Okay, lady," said the cabbie. "But if he's after you, I'd say you got no more chance than snow in a furnace."

Laurie could still see him when they reached the other side of the bridge. He was just coming out of the water on the island side. A little Coronado crowd had gathered to watch him, and he stepped on several of them getting ashore.

"You know how to find the Holiday Inn?" Fay asked the driver.

"Hell, lady, I'm a pro—and if I don't know where the Holiday is, I should be in the back and *you* should be drivin' this lousy tub!"

So he took them straight there.

In front of the Holiday Inn, Fay scrambled out, said nothing, and ran inside.

"Who pays me?" asked the cabbie.

"I suppose I'm elected," said Laurie. She dropped the jungle diamond into his hand.

He looked carefully at it. "This'll do." He grinned for the first time (maybe in years). He juggled the stone in his hand. "It's the real McCoy."

"I'm glad," said Laurie.

"You want to go back across?"

Laurie looked pensive. "I *thought* I did. But now I've changed my mind. Screw the bank! Take me downtown."

And they headed for—

Wait a minute. I'm messing this up. I'm *sure* Laurie didn't say, "Screw the bank." Ernest would say, "Screw the bank," but not Laurie. And Ernest wasn't in the cab. I'm sure of that. Besides, she was finished at the bank for the day, wasn't she? So the whole—wait! I've got this part all wrong.

Let's just pick it up with her, with Laurie, at the curb in front of the U. S. Grant Hotel in downtown San Diego, buying a paper from a dwarf who sold them because he couldn't do anything else for a living.

Gary walked up to her as she fumbled in her purse for change. He waited until she'd paid the dwarf before asking, "Do you have a gun?"

"Not in my purse," she said.

"Where, then?"

"My brother carries one. Ernest has a gun. He's a police officer here in the city."

"He with you?"

"No. He's on duty. Somewhere in the greater San Diego area. I wouldn't know how to contact him. And, frankly, I very much doubt that he'd hand his gun over to a stranger."

"I'm no stranger," said Gary. "You both know me."

She stared at him. "That's true," she said. "But still . . ."

"Forget it," he said, looking weary. "A policeman's handgun is no good. I need a machine gun. With a tripod and full belts. That's what I really need to hold them off with."

"There's an Army Surplus store farther down Broadway," she told him. "They might have what you need."

"Yep. Might."

"Who are you fighting?"

"Franco's troops. They're holding a position on the bridge."

"That's funny," she said. "I just came off the bridge and didn't see any troops."

"Did you take the Downtown or the South 5 off-ramp?"

"Downtown."

"That explains it. They're on the South 5 side."

He looked tan and very lean wearing his scuffed leather jacket and the down-brim felt hat. A tall man. Raw-boned. With a good honest American face. A lot of people loved him.

"Good luck," she said to him. "I hope you find what you're after."

"Thanks," he said, giving her a weary grin. Tired boy in a man's body.

"Maybe it's death you're *really* after," she said. "I think you ought to consider that as a subliminal motivation."

"Sure," he said. "Sure, I'll consider it." And he took off in a long, loping stride—leaving her with the dwarf who'd overheard their entire conversation but had no comments to make.

"Please, would you help me?" Little girl voice. A dazzle of blonde-white. Hair like white fire. White dress and white shoes. It was Norma Jean. Looking shattered. Broken. Her eyes all red in the corners. Veined, exhausted eyes.

"But what can I do?" Laurie asked.

Norma Jean shook her blonde head slowly. Confused. Little girl lost. "They're honest-to-Christ trying to kill me," she said. "No one believes that."

"I believe it," said Laurie.

"Thanks." Wan smile. "They think I *know* stuff . . . ever since Jack and I . . . the sex thing, I mean."

"You went to bed with Jack Kennedy."

"Yes, yes, yes! And that started them after me. Dumb, huh? Now they're very close and I need help. I don't know where to run anymore. *Can* you help me?"

"No," said Laurie. "If people are determined to kill you they will. They really will."

Norma Jean nodded. "Yeah. Sure. I guess they will, okay. I mean, Jeez! Who can stop them?"

"Ever kick a man in the balls?" Laurie asked. (*Hell* of a thing to ask!)

"Not really. I sort of tried once."

"Well, just wait for them. When they show up, you kick 'em in the balls. All right?"

"Yes, yes, in the *balls*! I'll do it!" She was suddenly shiny-bright with blonde happiness. A white dazzle of dress and

hair and teeth.

Laurie was glad, because you couldn't help liking Norma Jean. She thought about food. She was hungry. Time for din-din. She entered the coffee shop inside the lobby of the Grant (Carl's Quickbites), picked out a stool near the end of the counter, sat down with her paper.

She was reading about the ape when Clark came in wearing a long frock coat and flowing tie. His vest was red velvet. He walked up to the counter, snatched her paper, ruffled hastily through the pages.

"Nothing in here about the renegades," he growled. "Guess nobody in this burg cares how many boats get through. An outright shame, I say!"

"I'm sorry you're disturbed," she said. "May I have my paper back?"

"Sure." And he gave her a crooked smile of apology. Utterly charming. A rogue to the tips of his polished boots. Dashing! Full of vigor.

"What do you plan to do now?" she asked.

"Nothing," he said. "Frankly, I don't give a damn *who* wins the war! Blue or Gray. I just care about living through it." He scowled. "Still—when a bunch of scurvy renegades come gunrunning by night . . . well, I just get a little upset about it. Where are the patrol boats?"

She smiled faintly. "I don't know a thing about patrol boats."

"No, I guess you don't, pretty lady." And he kissed her cheek.

"Your mustache tickles," she said. "And you have bad breath."

This amused him. "So I've been told!"

After he left, the waitress came to take her order.

"Is the halibut fresh?"

"You bet."

Laurie ordered halibut.

"Dinner, or a la carte?" asked the waitress. She was chewing gum in a steady, circular rhythm.

"Dinner. Thousand on the salad. Baked potato. Chives, but no sour cream."

"We got just butter."

"Butter will be fine," said Laurie.

"And ice tea to drink. *Without* lemon."

"Gotcha," said the waitress.

Laurie was reading the paper again when a man in forest green sat down on the stool directly next to her. His mustache was smaller than Clark's. Thinner and smaller, but it looked very correct on him.

"This seat taken?" he asked.

"No, I'm quite alone."

"King Richard's alone," he said bitterly. "In Leopold's bloody hands, somewhere in Austria. Chained to a castle wall like an animal! I could find him, but I don't have enough men to attempt a rescue. I'd give my sword arm to free him!"

"They call him the Lion-Hearted, don't they?"

The man in green nodded. He wore a feather in his cap, and had a longbow slung across his chest. "That's because he has the heart of a lion. There's not a man in the kingdom with half his courage."

"What about *you*?"

His smile dazzled. "Me? Why, mum, I'm just a poor archer. From the king's forest."

She looked pensive. "I'd say you were a bit more than that."

"Perhaps." His eyes twinkled merrily. "A *bit* more."

"Are you going to order?" she asked. "The halibut's fresh."

"Red meat's what I need. Burger. Blood-rare."

The waitress, taking his order, frowned at him. "I'm sorry, mister, but you'll have to hang that thing over there." She pointed to a clothes rack. "We don't allow longbows at the counter."

He complied with the request, returning to wolf down his Carlburger while Laurie nibbled delicately at her fresh halibut. He finished long before she did, flipped a tip to the counter from a coinsack at his waist.

"I must away," he told Laurie. And he kissed her hand. Nice gesture. Very typical of him.

The waitress was pleased with the tip: a gold piece from the British Isles. "Some of these bums really stiff you,"

she said, pocketing the coin. "They come in, order half the menu, end up leaving me a lousy *dime*! Hell, I couldn't make it at this lousy job without decent tips. Couldn't make the rent. I'd have my rosy rear kicked out." She noticed that Laurie flushed at this.

On the street, which was Broadway, outside the U. S. Grant, Laurie thought she might as well take in a flick. They had a neat new cop-killer thing with Clint Eastwood playing half a block down. Violent, but done with lots of style. Eastwood directing himself. She could take a cab back to Coronado after seeing the flick.

It was dark now: Tuesday's shadow had retired for the week.

The movie cost four dollars for one adult. But Laurie didn't mind. She never regretted money spent on films. Never.

Marl was in the lobby, looking sullen when Laurie came in. He was wearing a frayed black turtle-neck sweater, standing by the popcorn machine with his hair thinning and his waist thick and swollen over his belt. He looked seedy.

"You should reduce," she told him.

"Let 'em use a double for the long shots," he said. "Just shoot my face in close-up."

"Even your face is puffy. You've developed jowls."

"What business is it of yours?"

"I admire your talent. Respect you. I hate to see you waste your natural resources."

"What do *you* know about natural resources?" he growled. "You're just a dumb broad."

"And you are crude," she said tightly.

"Nobody asked you to tell me I should reduce. Nobody."

"It's a plain fact. I'm stating the obvious."

"Did you ever work the docks?" he asked her.

"Hardly." She sniffed.

"Well, lady, crude is what you get twenty-four hours out of twenty-four when you're on the docks. And I been there. Or the police barracks: Ever been in the police barracks?"

"My brother has, but I have not."

"Dump on your brother!"

"Fine." She nodded. "Be crude. Be sullen. Be overweight. You'll simply lose your audience."

"My audience can go to hell," he said.

She wanted no more to do with him, and entered the theater. It was intermission. The overheads were on.

How many carpeted theater aisles had she walked down in her life? Thousands. Literally thousands. It was always a heady feeling, walking down the long aisle between rows, with the carpet soft and reassuring beneath her shoes. Toward a seat that promised adventure. It never failed to stir her soul, this magic moment of anticipation. Just before the lights dimmed and the curtains slipped whispering back from the big white screen.

Laurie took a seat on the aisle. No one next to her. Most of the row empty. She always sat on the aisle down close. Most people like being farther back. Close, she could be swept into the screen, actually be part of the gleaming, glowing action.

A really large man seated himself next to her. Weathered face under a wide Stetson. Wide jaw. Wide chest. He took off the Stetson and the corners of his eyes were sun-wrinkled. His voice was a rasp.

"I like to watch ole Clint," he said. "Ole Clint don't monkey around with a lot of fancy-antsy trick shots and up-your-nostril angles. Just does it straight and mean."

"I agree," she said. "But I call it art. A basic, primary art."

"Well, missy," said the big, wide-chested man, "I been in this game a lotta years, and *art* is a word I kinda like to avoid. Fairies use it a lot. When a man goes after *art* up there on the screen he usually comes up with horse manure." He grunted. "And I know a lot about horse manure."

"I'm sure you do."

"My Daddy had me on a bronc fore I could walk. Every time I fell off he just hauled me right back aboard. And I got the dents in my head to prove it."

The houselights were dimming slowly to black.

"Picture's beginning," she said. "I

never talk during a film."

"Me neither," he said. "I may belch, but I never talk." And his laughter was a low rumble.

Laurie walked out halfway through the picture. This man disturbed her, and she just couldn't concentrate. Also, as I have told you (and you can see for yourself by now), she was losing her mind.

So Laurie left the theater.

Back in her apartment (in Coronado), Judy was there, looking for a slipper. Alan had gone, but Judy didn't know where; she hadn't seen him.

"What color is it?" asked Laurie.

"Red. Bright red. With spangles."

"Where's the *other* one?"

"In my bedroom. I just wore one, and it slipped off."

"What are you doing in this apartment?"

Judy stared at her. "That's obvious. I'm looking for my slipper."

"No, I mean—why did you come *here* to look for it? For what reason?"

"Is this U-210?"

"No, that's one floor below."

"Well, honey, I thought this was U-210 when I came in. Door was open—and all these roach pits look just alike."

"I've never seen a roach anywhere in this complex," said Laurie. "I'm sure you—"

"Doesn't matter. All that matters is my slipper's gone."

"It can't be *gone*. Not if you were wearing it when you arrived."

"Then *you* find it, hotshot!" said Judy. She flopped loosely into the green reclining chair by the window. "You got a helluva view from here."

"Yes, it's nice. Especially at night."

"You can see all the lights shining on the water," said Judy. "Can't see doodly-poop from my window. You must pay plenty for this view. How much you pay?"

"Three-forty per month, including utilities," Laurie said.

Judy jumped to her stockinged feet. "That's twenty *less* than I'm paying! I'm being ripped off!"

"Well, you should complain to the manager. Maybe he'll give you a reduc-

tion."

"Nuts!" sighed Judy. "I just want my slipper."

Laurie found it in the kitchen under the table. Judy could not, for the life of her, figure out how it got into the kitchen.

"I didn't even go *in* there. I hate sinks and dishes!"

"I'm glad I was able to find it for you."

"Yeah—you're Little Miss Findit, okay. Little Miss Hunt-and-Findit."

"You sound resentful."

"That's because I hate people who go around finding things other people lose."

"You can leave now," Laurie said flatly. She'd had enough of Judy.

"Can you lay some reds on me?"

"I have no idea what you mean." (And she really *didn't*!)

"Aw, forget it. You wouldn't know a red if one up and *bit* you. Honey, you're something for the books!"

And Judy limped out wearing her spangled slipper.

Laurie shut the door and locked it. Then she took a shower and went to bed.

And slept until Saturday.

I know, I know . . . what happened to Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, *right*? Well, it's like that with crazy people; they sleep for days at a stretch. The brain's all fogged. Doesn't function. Normally, the brain is like an alarm clock—it wakes you when you sleep too long. But Laurie's clock was haywire; all the cogs and springs were missing.

So she woke up on Saturday.

In a panic.

She knew all about Saturday's shadow, and each Friday night she carefully drew the drapes across the window, making sure it couldn't get in. She never left the place, dawn to dark, on a Saturday. Ate all her meals from the fridge, watched movies on TV, and read the papers. If the phone rang she never answered it. Not that anyone but Ernest ever called her. And he knew enough not to call her on Saturday. (Shadows can slip into a room through an open telephone line.)



But now, here it was Saturday, and the windows were wide open, with the drapes pulled back like skin on a wound with the shadow in the middle.

Of the apartment.

In the middle of *her* apartment.

Not moving. Just lying there, dark and venomous and deadly. It had entered while she slept.

Laurie stared at it in horror. Nobody had to tell her it was Saturday's shadow; she recognized it instantly.

The catch was (Ha!) it was between her and the door. If she could reach the door before it touched her, tore at her, she could get into the hallway and stay there, huddled against the wall, until it left.

There were no windows in the hall. It couldn't follow her there.

Problem: how to reach the door? The shadow wasn't moving, but that didn't mean it *couldn't* move, fast as an owl blinks. It would cut off her retreat, and when its shark-sharp edges touched her skin she'd be slashed . . . and eaten alive.

Which was the really lousy part. You *knew* it was devouring you while it was doing it: Like a snake swallowing a mouse; the mouse always knows what's happening to it.

And Laurie was a mouse. All her life, hiding in the dark, dreaming cinema dreams, she'd been a mouse.

And now she was about to be devoured:

She knew she couldn't stay where was was—because it would come and *get* her if she stayed where she was. The sofa folded out to make a studio bed, and that's where she was.

With the shadow all around her. Black and silent and terrible.

Waiting.

Very slowly . . . very, very slowly, she got up.

It hadn't moved.

Not *yet*.

She wished, desperately, that ole Humph were here. Or Gary. Or Alan. Or Clark. Or Clint. Or even Big John. They could deal with shadows because they were shadow people. They moved in shadowy power across the screen. *They* could deal with Saturday's shadow. It couldn't hurt *them* . . . kill *them* . . . eat *them* alive. . . .

I'll jump across, she (probably) told herself. It doesn't extend more than four feet in front of me—so I should be able to stand on the bed and *leap* over it, then be out the door before it can—Oh, God! It's *moving*! Widening. Coming toward the bed . . . flowing out to cover the gap between the rug and the door.

Look how *swiftly* it moves! Sliding . . . oiling across the rug . . . rippling like the skin of some dark sea-thing. . . .

Laurie stood up, ready to jump.

There was only a thin strip of unshadowed wood left to land on near the door. If she missed it the shadow-teeth would sink deep into her flesh and she'd—

"Don't!" Ernest said from the doorway. He had his .38 Police Special in his right hand. "You'll never make it," he told Laurie.

"My God, Ernest—what are you doing with the gun?" Note

of genuine hysteria in her voice. Understandable.

"I can save you," Ernest told her. "Only I can save you."

And I shot her. Full load.

The bullets banged and slapped her back against the wall, the way Alan's bullets had slapped Palance back into those wooden barrels at the saloon.

I was fast. Fast with a gun.

Laurie flopped down, gouting red from many places. But it didn't hurt. No pain for my sis. I'd seen to that. I'd saved her.

I left her there, angled against the wall (in blood), one arm bent under her, staring at me with round glassy dead eyes, the strap of her nightgown all slipped down, revealing the lovely creamed upper slope of her breasts.

Had *she* seen that in the cab near the grocer's, or had I seen that?

Was it Ernest who'd talked to Gary outside the U. S. Grant?

It's very difficult to keep it all cool and precise and logical. Which is vital. Because if everything isn't cool, and

precise and logical, nothing makes any sense. Not me. Not Laurie. Not Ernest. No part. Any sense.

Not even Saturday's shadow.

Now . . . let's see. Let's see now. *I'm* not Laurie. Not anymore. Can't be. She's all dead. I guess I was always Ernest—but police work can eat at you like a shadow (Ha!) and people yell at you, and suddenly you want to fire your .38 Police Special at something. You *need* to do this. It's very vital, and important to discharge your weapon.

And you can't kill Saturday's shadow. Any fool knows that.

So you kill your sister instead.

To save her,

But now, right now, I'm not Ernest anymore either. I'm just *me*. Whoever or whatever's left inside after Laurie and Mama and Ernest have gone. That's who I am: what's left.

The residual me.

Oh, there's one final thing I should tell you.

Where I am now (Secret!) it can't ever reach me.

All the doors are locked. And the windows are closed. With drawn curtains.

To keep it out.

You see, I took her away from it.

It really wanted her.

(Ha! Fooled it!)

It hates me. It really *hates* me.

But it can't *do* anything.

To get even.

For taking away Laurie.

Not if I just

stay

and stay and stay

here

I'm

safe

where

it can't

ever

find

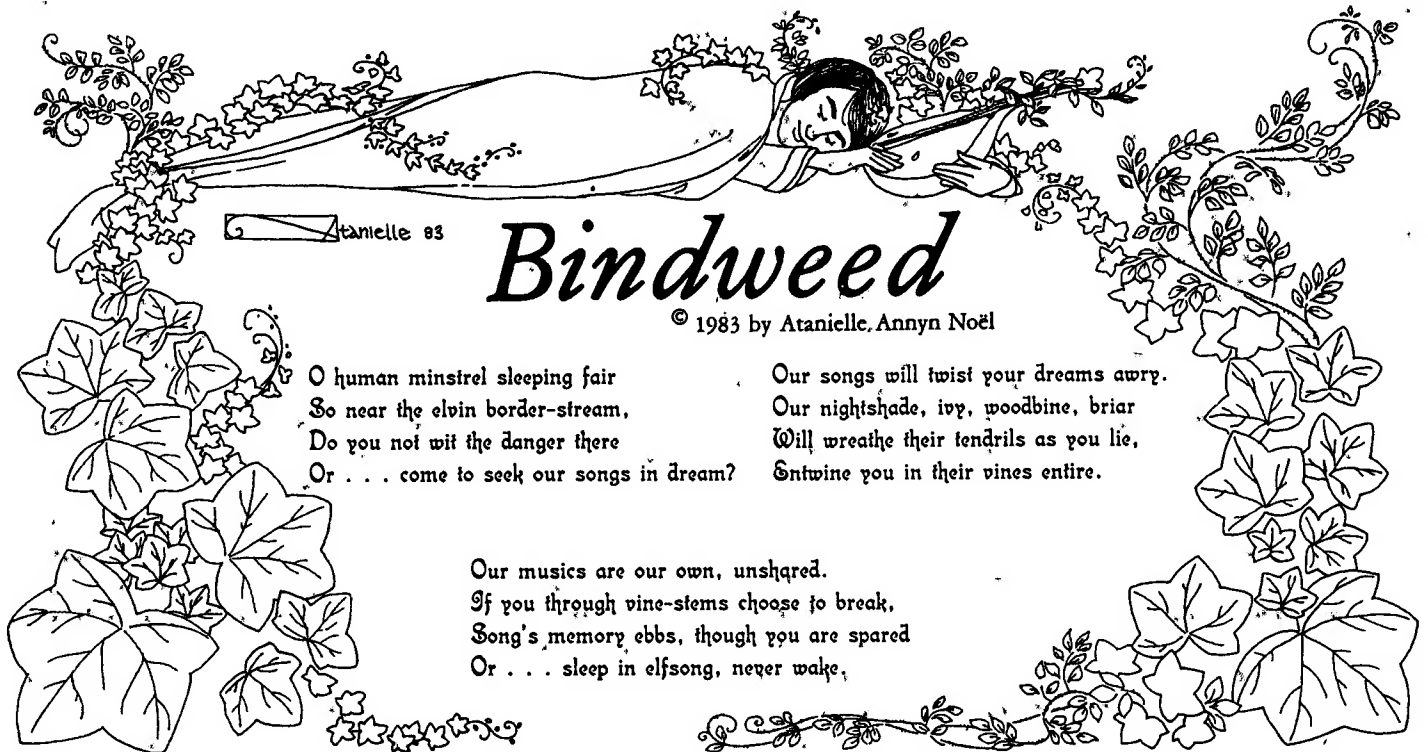
me (Mama)

me (Laurie)

me (Ernest)

me!

—  —



Bindweed

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O human minstrel sleeping fair
So near the elvin border-stream,
Do you not wit the danger there
Or . . . come to seek our songs in dream?

Our songs will twist your dreams awry.
Our nightshade, ivy, woodbine, briar
Will wreath their tendrils as you lie,
Entwine you in their vines entire.

Our musics are our own, unshared.
If you through vine-stems choose to break,
Song's memory ebbs, though you are spared
Or . . . sleep in elfsong, never wake,